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ABSTRACT

The goal of teaching philosophy is to develop philosophically literate students and to ensure that students develop philosophical literacy by design and not by chance. Perhaps the best method for teaching philosophy to beginning students is the public model, in which the practice of defending positions in the public arena forces students to become more self-reflective about their positions. Multiple choice exams can be an effective testing method for philosophy courses in that they can encourage students to think deeply about philosophical issues, test whether students can make conceptual distinctions, and help instructors handle grading with large classes and course loads. However, essay exams or written papers represent the best and most appropriate method for testing philosophical literacy. In addition to in-class essay questions on exams, out-of-class critical essay papers provide useful means of determining outcomes that are not dependent upon students' memory on a given test day. In an ideal grading mix, 20% to 25% of the final grade should reflect the students' scores on the final exam, 20% to 25% should reflect student scores on out-of-class writing assignments, and 0 to 20% should reflect the quality of a student's participation in classroom discussion and debates. Sample multiple choice questions are appended. (HAA)

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ED 409 943

On Assessing Philosophical Literacy

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1. The goal in teaching philosophy is to develop philosophically literate students. I take my precise teaching task to be to ensure that students develop philosophical literacy by design and not by chance. Now, what does it mean to be philosophically literate, and how do I know when students achieve it? In this paper I intend to delineate what philosophical literacy means in order to determine its proper method of assessment. My main concern is to see if my current method of assessment in my philosophy course is the most proper one.

2. In an enlightening article called 'Developing Philosophical Literacy' Miller (1995) articulates both what it means to be and how one goes about developing philosophical literacy. He claims that the willingness to go public with one's thoughts is itself what philosophy is about. He suggests that the best method for teaching philosophy to the beginning student is what he calls the public model. The public model is based on the legacy of Socrates who engages others in dialogue in order to get people to publically defend their positions. Students through the practice of defending their position in the public arena are forced to be more self-reflective about their positions and justifications. Students are encouraged to clarify their concepts, uncover linguistic confusions and make conceptual distinctions. All this helps them acquire the psychological skill of critical self-regulation of their thought. Miller notes that it is this skill that is at the heart of what the professional philosophers mean by philosophizing. So, to become

philosophically literate is to develop the ability to become self-reflective about and to critically scrutinize one's thinking processes.

Philosophy is more of a means than an end. To become philosophically literate is to develop the ability to think through arguments and to push concepts and beliefs further to see how they cash-out in the end.

There is yet more to developing philosophical literacy in students. Howe (1988) observes that writing cannot be disentangled from reasoning. To learn how to write in a critical and self-reflective manner is to become philosophically literate. It is to develop the ability to clearly and concisely write one's thoughts and do so in an orderly and reasoned manner.

Reading is a gateway intellectual activity. Learning to read philosophy is an important first step in learning philosophy. Reading passages aloud in the classroom along with a running commentary can be instructive. Miller says that 'such a procedure makes the teacher's critical reading skills publicly available for students to notice and assimilate.' A public reading of philosophy does not leave the 'learning-to-read-philosophy' to chance. Having critical reading skills is part of being philosophically literate.

The above account of philosophical literacy, often called the critical thinking skills approach, is incomplete because it presupposes that philosophy has no content matter. To complete the picture we must add knowledge of the ideas and concerns of past and present philosophers, knowledge of the history of great ideas. Or as Gutting (1996) humorously portrays it: "'Dr. Jones, does God exist?' 'Well, Descartes thought so, but Hume had his doubts.'" Thus, to develop philosophical literacy is to develop critical thinking ability and knowledge of the history of ideas.

3. My worry is not that I do not provide fertile enough ground to enable students to develop philosophical literacy, but that I do not have the most appropriate measure of its achievement.

I use three multiple choice (MC) exams and one written assignment (WA) to measure the degree to which students have developed philosophical literacy. Each exam is worth 25% of the final grade, and the WA is worth 25% as well. Each MC exam consists of 50 questions. Each test covers a third of the semester. The WA is basically a take home essay examination. I provide students with a list of questions based on the assigned readings. Since the primary assessment tool is the MC exam, the worry is that it does not precisely measure the achievement of philosophical literacy.

When I initially began thinking about writing this paper, I

intended to claim that MC exams adequately measure philosophical literacy. However, in the course of focusing in on what philosophical literacy is I have come to the realization that my original position is less defensible than I had supposed.

To be honest with myself I think that a considerable part of my motivation for defending MC exams was self-serving. After all I am comfortable with and wish not to disturb my classroom examination practices. MC exams are an expedient method of assessment, quick and easy to grade. All one has to do to grade them is run the answer sheets through the scantron machine, a ten minute process. The teaching load at Middlesex County College (MCC) is heavy, five sections per semester. On average there are 25 students in each class. So the total number of students that I teach is 125. In comparison with MC exams to grade 125 in-class essay exams takes hours rather than minutes. The WA in my philosophy course takes me three to four weeks to grade.

Besides expediency and practicality how did I arrive at the position that MC exams are a suitable enough measure to test competence in and comprehension of philosophy? For most of my academic career I had taught psychology courses. All of my collegiate teaching experiences were confined to teaching low level, survey-type psychology courses, primarily one course--introductory psychology. The traditional method of assessment in those courses has been the MC exam. One would be hard pressed to

find a teacher at MCC who doesn't test introductory psychology students in this way. In addition, when I was an undergraduate student at Rutgers U. I was tested with MC exams in my introductory psychology class. Out of force of habit I continued the testing practice I was most familiar and comfortable with.

I have had a mid-career change in teaching assignments. It was during my last sabbatical that I returned to graduate school to study philosophy. When I first started teaching philosophy my knowledge of it was quite thin. I had next to no experience in taking or teaching undergraduate philosophy courses. I thought philosophical literacy only consisted of the study of the history of great ideas. If this were so, then the MC exam would be a suitable method of assessment.

My impression of the typical MCC student contributed to my inclination to use MC exams. Many students at MCC are rather unfamiliar with rigorous academic practices. In general, their norms of literacy are less well developed than traditional college students. In addition to attending MCC practically all students hold a job during the course of a semester. I have surveyed my students and found that they spend on average 15-20 hours per week working, with a substantial minority working 35-40 hours. For those who work such long hours it is about as much as they can manage to follow your lecture and see things when you point them out. Working is a tremendous burden and reduces the time they

could devote to academics. So my expectations were that the achievement of some modest cognitive goals would constitute success enough. Since the students at MCC are for the most part getting their first exposure to philosophy in my introductory level course it would seem to me that I should be very careful to provide them with elementary philosophical information. My academic standards for teaching philosophy were set rather lower. I reasoned that MC exams would be compatible with this sort of standard for this sort of student.

There is a story in the introductory section of 'The Academic Crisis of the Community College' by McGrath and Spear (1991) that I find to be pertinent to my point here. The story is about Spears' experience when handing back mid-term examination papers. Most students did exceedingly poorly. There was a wide gap between the quality of the students' submissions and what the professor thinks of as college-level work. Most papers were less than 100 words long. Little care was taken in packaging the exam, i.e., the appearances of the submissions were sloppy. Often, key words were spelled wrong, e.g., phylosopy. On occasion even the names of authors of the articles upon which the exam was based were misspelled. The topic of the articles was abortion. Rather than analyzing the authors views on abortion students often ignored them and gave their own opinions, or they would summarize one article and then summarize the other without as much as an attempt at a comparison of the authors' views. One student just copied the

editorial introductions of the articles from the anthology. This description rings true. I have had more than my share of similar experiences, which have contributed to my views on the academic readiness and potential of a substantial portion of MCC students.

Another reason for my low academic expectations are the attitudes of many students toward the discipline of philosophy. They are a real impediment. Many students find philosophy to be a useless mental exercise. Its constant quibbling, doubting and dialectics are construed as just word games. Since philosophy offers few definitive answers, students often become frustrated and uncomfortable grappling with philosophical arguments. They conflate the political claim that everyone has a right to their own opinions with the epistemological claim that everyones' opinions are right, which leads them to the conclusion, 'Why argue?'. To get them to even consider philosophical literacy as a desirable option is a considerable struggle. So what can I hope for from students with such an attitude towards the subject? I thought not too much more than a recognition of basic philosophical issues and concepts. MC exams are just the sort of assessment technique compatible with such watered down academic standards.

However, there are positive reasons to use MC exams in assessing philosophical literacy. For example, Collins (1993), in 'Examining Philosophy: 'Choose the Best Answer', contends that to have students wrestle with genuine philosophical questions, in

writing or orally, is certainly an appropriate assessment method, but 'it need not be the only one'. MC exams can be useful as well.

But how can they be useful? Aren't MC exam questions trivial and unable to reveal the critical reasoning abilities of the student? Collins claims that a closer look at this objection might reveal that it is one that is more precisely directed against the use of bad rather than good questions. One can design questions to make the students think deeply about philosophical issues. One can design them to test whether students can make conceptual distinctions. I have spent many hours custom-designing MC questions that tightly cohere with my lecture. I believe my questions have been most challenging to the students, making them think and forcing them to make fine distinctions.

To illustrate how a MC question can test for knowledge of both fundamental philosophical concepts and conceptual distinctions consider the following:

What does Plato mean by the 'sensible world'?
1. a world that is perceived by the senses
2. a world that is reasonable to understand
3. a world that contains good judgment
4. both 1 and 2

This question tests for the student's knowledge of Plato's circumscribed use of 'sensible', and it does so with alternatives that are plausible on the ordinary understanding of that word. Getting this question right turns on the student's understanding of

1) the conceptual distinction between the Form world and the sensible world and 2) the distinction between the sensory sense of 'sensible' and the reasonable sense. [See appendix A for a wider sample of my custom-designed MC questions.]

MC exams not only test for knowledge of fundamental philosophical concepts and conceptual distinctions, but they function as diagnostic tools. When reviewing MC exams discussions with the students on the merits of the alternative choices can sharpen their critical thinking abilities and focus their attention on conceptual distinctions.

Since MC exams ask more questions than essay exams do they allow the professor to test a wider domain of the course material. Thus, Howe (1988) points out, essay exams can limit the students' opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.

Howe also contends that performance on MC exams has predictive validity, i.e., MC test scores correlate with and are predictive of performance on other assessment methods. In a comment that raised my eyebrows Howe astutely observes, 'If fixed-response testing is invalid, then philosophy departments would be hard pressed to justify using measures such as the Graduate Record Exam in making admissions decisions.'

Taking this cue from Howe, I decided to investigate whether my

MC exams have any predictive validity. I have found that in my philosophy classes in the fall of 96' scores on MC exams were moderately predictive of performance on the WA. The following table shows that there is a moderately positive correlation between student scores on each of their MC exams and their scores on the WA as well as on their total score on all MC exams combined and their scores on the WA:

Correlations Between Exam Scores and WA Scores	
MC Exam 1	.439
MC Exam 2	.582
MC Exam 3	.569
All MC Exams combined	.652

Thus, there is truth to Howe's claim that MC exams are not necessarily invalid. I suppose I have reason to believe that I was not absolutely less than rational and, perhaps, even, at least, partially justified in using MC exams. They can usefully and quite properly assess, at least, part of what is meant by philosophical literacy.

However, I am a bit suspicious about these correlations because it is possible that I was partial in grading the WAs. Student performance on the first two MC exams might have effected how I evaluated their WA.

I will have more to say about this partiality problem in the next section of the paper. However, for now, this partiality problem points to a further advantage of MC exams. They avoid the partiality that may occur in grading essay exams, since the student

grade doesn't depend on the professor's opinions of her. In addition, because essay exams can take hours or days to grade one's consistency in grading may unravel, but by the very nature of MC exams this isn't an issue.

4. In all the articles I have read in preparation for this paper there is universal agreement that some sort of writing assessment--either an essay exam or written paper--is the most natural method to measure the achievement of philosophical literacy. There can be no substitute for written assignments. Indeed, it now seems counter-intuitive to me to even suggest that essay exams or written papers are not the best nor most appropriate nor most trustworthy test for and of philosophical literacy.

Earlier I have pointed to one advantage of using MC questions--that through sheer numbers they can test an entire domain of the course in comparison with essay questions which test a more limited scope. However, if the professed purpose of teaching philosophy is less the learning of **facts** and more the cultivation of a method of thinking, then testing students on the entire domain of the course misses the point. Indeed, on occasion it may be counterproductive. Sometimes I have felt the pressure to cover all the **facts** that are on the forthcoming MC exam. So I found myself hurriedly and mechanically 'covering the material' and not engaging in a proper philosophical analysis.

We have seen that my MC exams have moderate predictive validity. Nevertheless, Howe is right to say that predictive validity is not the only consideration in judging the suitability of an exam. To possess information about philosophy without possessing 'the ability to engage in its basic activities with a reasonable degree of skill' (Miller, 1995) is not to be fully philosophically literate. Essay exams force students to become 'player-literate' or, at least, reveal whether students are or are not so. Howe (1988) mentions that the problem with MC questions is that they are fixed-responses. They cannot capture the students' ability to construct arguments or offer criticisms or develop new insights. They cannot gauge the novelty or creativity of the students' thinking. Writing samples can do this directly. It is hard to tell from MC exams alone whether a student has become 'player-literate' or is merely 'viewer-literate'. A student may be able to recognize what Plato means by the 'sensible world' without being able to publically or privately defend a philosophical claim. MC exams are not a fine-grained enough tool, whereas essay exams and WAs are, if designed properly.

When I had mistakenly believed that philosophy was the history of great ideas I thought that MC exams were sufficient to assess student comprehension and competence in philosophy. I still think that they are useful and proper in testing this in so far as what is meant by this is 'viewer-literacy'. However, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with their use as the primary assessment

tool. This is because they leave me with a feeling of emptiness. There is a question and a student answer, but something is missing. What is the actual relationship between the two? I have created custom-designed MC questions that tightly cohere with my lecture and seem very challenging to the students, but it is not apparent to me what is actually occurring in the student's mind during the exam. And that is what should count most. There is no direct visible link between the students' thinking and the lead markings on the scantron sheet. There is a supposed link, but I feel lately that the link is too indirect and not complete enough for me. The truth of this insufficiency has been gnawing away at me, disturbing me, for quite some time now, and writing this paper has given me the opportunity to confront myself with it. Needless to say, it is time to alter the mix of assessment mechanisms I employ to test for philosophical literacy.

However, before I present the alterations of my assessment tools, there is a bit more to say about essay exams. It is a good policy to be mindful not only of the advantages of using them, but also of some disadvantages. With a little forethought the disadvantages can be minimized.

There is the matter of grading them. The moral imperative in grading any sort of exam is to follow the principle of strict impartiality. As mentioned earlier, it may be difficult to maintain one's impartiality in grading essay exams. Sometimes,

whether consciously or nonconsciously one's previous assessment of the individual student, whether based on classroom participation or past test performances, may effect the grading of her writing sample. This is a flaw, but not a fatal one. It can be easily remedied by grading writing samples blindly. Read the paper first, and look at who wrote it later.

Edwards (1996) points out that the problem with any exam is that it 'only test[s] how much a student can remember on a particular day, and how well she performs under the pressure of a time constraint.' And since philosophy is not a matter of the students learning facts, but learning, as she puts it, 'a way of thinking about themselves, their thoughts, and their world in a reflective and critical but open-minded way', then any exams, even essay exams, are just not suitable to this goal.

Edwards replaces in-class essay exams with out-of-class critical essay papers based on weekly reading assignments. This method is less dependent on a student's memory on any given test day, and it loosens the artificial time constraints of in-class exams. One of her students commented at the end of her course, 'I learned so much this way because I found that the writing of the papers made me think more critically about the topics.' She believes that students were forced to spend more time grappling with the reading material in order to comprehend it. An additional advantage of this method is that students were better prepared for

classroom discussions because they had already done much thinking about the topics.

What is particularly useful about a student's writing sample is that it is a suspended piece of work that itself provides the opportunity and means to teach philosophical literacy. One should discuss the writing sample with the student to guide and monitor her progress. It can be very useful to go over drafts with her and ask her questions of intent in order to clear up any ambiguities or confusions. It can be useful to show her areas that need more thinking through as well as areas that are especially well constructed. Simply, it is an opportunity to make suggestions, instructive criticisms, or commendations, if warranted. Now when a student rewrites her draft she is more focused-in on and better informed about both its strong and weak points and its direction. I agree with Miller (1995) when he says that rewriting should be the norm because there is no substitution for repetition and practice. The point is that through repetition and practice the student effectively learns how to write philosophically.

5. To teach philosophical literacy requires that much classroom time be spent on the public reading and interpreting of philosophical passages. It requires much classroom time be spent on rigorous, self-reflective public debate. It requires an intensive writing and rewriting of essays. These activities demand that students be given individualized attention and instruction.

So, to teach philosophy in a manner which is consistent with its identity and authenticity is to teach it in a manner which is intensive, demanding and time-consuming. Edwards alludes to this point when she says, in the context of continually refining her course, that she is trying to find 'ways to reduce the amount of grading this method [intensive writing approach] requires'. Miller raises an additional point that whether teaching philosophy can conform to the demands of such an individualized model depends on institutional arrangements.

Taking Miller's point seriously, to pick a set of methods for assessing philosophical literacy is not just a straightforward matter of choosing the most effective and appropriate ones, but of choosing the most effective and appropriate ones given the institutional arrangements that one is subject to. The logic of my course load and student load, both of which are quite heavy (as mentioned earlier), is quiet compelling. It imposes limits on the amount of time, effort and energy I have to devote to implementing the individualized model needed to develop philosophical literacy. It was constraining enough so as to persuade me in the past to adopt a primary assessment method that was expedient, but less than ideal. However, as I have mentioned above, it seems quite clear to me that it is time to change my primary method of assessing philosophical literacy. It is time to use writing samples and classroom participation more and MC questions less.

6. I intend to alter the mix of assessment mechanisms I employ so that they will be more consistent with the identity of philosophy. I shall do so in the following way. Anywhere between 20 - 25% of the final grade will reflect the scores students earn on each of three exams. Each exam will consist of 20 - 30 MC questions and 2 or 3 essay questions.

Given the institutional arrangements that I function within I cannot totally discard the use of MC questions. The amount of time that I have available to grade exams is limited by the sheer number of sections that I teach and the sheer numbers of students I am responsible for educating. Exams with MC questions are still the most practical assessment tools in this regard, since they are quick and easy to grade.

Their value does not rely only on their expediency. They can be useful for assessing, at least, one part of philosophical literacy--'viewer literacy'. Thus, they can be useful as long as they are not the sole means to assess philosophical literacy. They can make students think deeply about philosophical issues and force them to make conceptual distinctions. They can test for knowledge of the history of ideas, and they can have moderately positive predictive validity.

Moreover, exams with MC questions can be helpful to students that do not possess good writing skills, yet who are intelligent

students who diligently study and adequately comprehend the philosophical material. To assess students solely on their written work gives an undue advantage to students who are good writers. While it is true that both a large part of knowing something is being able to express it clearly and concisely and that thinking and writing are intimately connected, it is, also, true that some students with poor writing skills are not necessarily students who have not comprehended the material. In these cases to assess the student solely on her writing samples would be to assess her by a device which does not take full advantage of her intellectual strengths. This would not be very charitable to the student.

Of course, to make my assessment mechanisms more in line with a more complete or direct or truer test of philosophical literacy I have added essay questions to my exams. My comments in section four attest to the fact that I have been painfully aware of the need for and desiderative of more writing samples from the students in order to more appropriately and properly test their developing philosophical literacy. With the use of these essay questions and the use of an out-of-class WA (to be mentioned below) I shall feel more comfortable with my assessment techniques. I will feel that they are more legitimate and authentic measures of philosophical literacy than the measures I had been employing. I am more confident that I will be able to gain a greater assess to the students' critical thinking abilities. I will be able to see more directly whether they have been thoughtful in their approach to the

coursework. I will be able to see more directly their ability to order and develop their thoughts, their ability to reason well, and their ability to be self-reflective. Not only will I be able to see more directly their comprehension of the issues and topics in the history of ideas, but I can gauge the novelty and creativity of their thinking as well. In short, I will be able to see whether they have become 'player-literate' in philosophy.

Anywhere between 20 - 25% of the final grade will reflect student scores on an out-of-class WA. I intend to go over drafts of the WA with students. This will serve, at least, two functions: a) it will give me an opportunity to make suggestions and offer instructive criticisms to students on a one-on-one basis so that they can be in a better position to perform a successful rewrite of their papers and b) it, itself, will provide an additional opportunity to teach philosophical literacy.

The out-of-class WA offers a different sort of opportunity to earn a grade than the exams mentioned above and the class participation that will be mentioned below. One advantage that the out-of-class WA offers for students is that it liberates them from the artificial constraints that in-class exams impose. With this assessment device students are not limited to what they can remember during an 80 minute time-span on one particular day as they are by in-class exams. Another advantage is that students will likely spend more time grappling with the reading material in

order to comprehend it. In addition, the repetition and practice of rewriting drafts makes is more likely that students will effectively learn to write philosophically.

In recognition of the public model in developing philosophical literacy, anywhere between 0 - 20% of the final grade will reflect the quality of a student's participation in classroom discussions and debates.

Now, why this sliding scale? I intend to use student participation in classroom discussions and debates in a charitable way. I shall encourage students to engage in them and be supportive of their efforts to do so. I shall involve them in discussions and debates as a matter of classroom practice. I shall assess the quality of their participation. I expect a wide difference in student ability in this area. Some students may already exhibit considerable skill at publically defending their claims and in pointing out flaws in their opponents positions. They may demonstrate skill in 'thinking on their feet', so to speak. That is, they already can publically think through arguments, make adjustments and push concepts and beliefs further to see how they cash-out. Their public speaking skills may already reveal a critical and self-reflective manner of thinking. In these cases to assess the student with the maximum percentage for class participation would be to assess her by a mechanism which takes full advantage of the student's intellectual strength. Some

students may exhibit very little skill in this area. If a student shows significant improvement in her public speaking skills over the course of the semester, then she, too, can be assessed with the maximum percentage for classroom participation. If a student shows only small increments in these skills over the course of the semester, then she can be given credit for the improvement, but in a manner that reflects its proportional value. In this case to assess the student with the maximum percentage for class participation would be to assess her by a mechanism which does not take full advantage of her intellectual strength. I want to make it a practice to try to assess students by means which tap-in to their intellectual strengths. So, I shall leave to my discretion, based on the unique circumstances of each case, the precise percentage of the final grade that is based on the student's classroom participation.

However, some might point-out that it is precisely this public speaking and debating skill that is being taught. Thus, I should not be reluctant to grade students by the maximum percentage when assessing the quality of their participation in classroom discussions or, perhaps, more to the point, the lack thereof. While it is true that the willingness to go public with one's claims and arguments is, itself, what philosophy is all about, I believe that it is equally true that to force students to engage in this highly charged and highly public on-stage activity and, especially, to **grade** or **evaluate them** on it before they have the

sufficient skills to perform the task reasonably well may be pedagogically detrimental. It is more like putting the cart before the horse, but with serious academic consequences attached to this action. For many students this aspect of philosophical literacy develops over longer periods of time than one semester, especially if that one semester is the first or second semester of a student's community college career. We must bear in mind that at the introductory level and, especially, at the community college the public model is more likely to be a method to teach philosophical literacy and less likely to be a method to evaluate it.

In addition, let us put this activity in its proper perspective, which is within the context of the entire introductory philosophy course. Going public with one's arguments is just one aspect of philosophical literacy, and the assessment of public speaking and debating is just one measure of it. I shall assess the quality of the student's classroom participation. I shall not totally ignore the fact that some have engaged in it poorly or have not engaged in it at all. Nevertheless, it is preferable that students have various opportunities to earn their grades in any course. One should make it a practice to try to assess students in the most charitable way that one can and that is by means which tap-in to their intellectual strengths, not by means which do not. If they show sufficient proficiency in the development of philosophical literacy on a variety of other assessment mechanisms, I believe that it is prudent to put less weight on public speaking

and debating and more weight on these other evaluations.

I have provided assessment devices with the intent to give the student various opportunities in various ways (recognition tasks via MC questions, discussions and debates via classroom participation, and writing samples via essay questions and the WA) to earn their grades in my philosophy course. By offering students a variety of means by which they can earn a grade it is likely that, at least, one and, hopefully, more than one of the means will tap-in to a student's particular intellectual strength. This could work to the students advantage because if I could discover that one device is making clearer what the others are obscuring about the student's effort and achievement, then I can make an informed evaluation of the student's abilities that goes beyond a mere adding up of scores on exams. It will afford me the opportunity to evaluate the student more by 'the spirit of the law' and less by 'the letter of it' so to speak.

7. This investigation has forced me to take a good, hard look at my teaching practices. It has forced me to be very self-conscious of the goals that I intend to achieve in teaching philosophy. It has forced me to define the precise nature of philosophical literacy and to take a self-searching analysis of my methods of assessing it. While the conclusions that I have reached from this analysis may seem obvious this investigation is not without merit for it has forced me out of my complacency.

And, as the result of this investigation, I see more clearly what I am doing and what I am supposed to be doing when I teach philosophical literacy and assess its achievement. Since I know better what I mean to do, I can better mean what I do and better do what I mean. It is especially useful and important to be clear about what it is that one does when, as in the present case, it has serious consequences for others.

Appendix A

1. According to possible world theory possible worlds
    1. exist only as ideas in peoples' minds
    2. exist in physical space
    3. exist in the nonphysical manifold of logical space
    4. do not have any sort of existence, physical or nonphysical

This question tests for the student's knowledge of the metaphysical status of possible worlds in the context of possible world theory. Getting this question right turns on the student's understanding of what is meant by the philosophical concept possible worlds and in understanding the sense in which these supposed entities exist. Thus, the student should be able to appreciate the possibility that entities that do not exist physically or mentally could still exist, nevertheless. That is, they could be both mind-independent as well as material-independent and, yet, still exist. This question has, at least, two alternatives (1 and 4) that are plausible on the common sense understanding of what is meant by 'possible'.

2. The epistemic point of the blind man case is:
    1. true belief is a sufficient condition for knowledge
    2. truth alone is a sufficient condition for knowledge
    3. truth isn't a necessary condition for knowledge
    4. true belief is not a sufficient condition for knowledge

This question asks the students to recognize Plato's theory of knowledge and his reason for including justification as an essential component of it. Plato claims that a blind man may have successfully navigated a stretch of road, but it cannot be said that he knows the road, since he had no justification for the steps

that he had taken. His successful navigation was due to luck and not reason. Likewise, true belief is not enough for one to have knowledge. One might have arrived at that knowledge due to luck and not reason. In addition, this question requires that the student understands the meaning of 'a sufficient condition'. I consider alternatives 1 and 2 to be plausible alternatives, since they are claims many students have made themselves during my lectures on Plato's theory of knowledge.

3. Pinker uses the sentence 'Canis hominem mordet' to demonstrate that in Latin it is _____ that communicates the who-did-what-to-whom feature of language
   1. trial and error
   2. the order of words
   3. the suffix
   4. stimulus-response connections

This question tests for the student's knowledge of Chomsky's framework for the understanding of how language works. The parameters of a language are the switches that particular languages use in order to tap the principles that all languages are based upon. Getting this question right turns on the student's understanding of Chomsky's concept of parameter, its distinction from his concept of principles and its application in Latin as distinguished from its application in English. Alternative 2 is a plausible alternative since English uses this parameter. Perhaps, 1 and 4 are plausible as well. Because there is such a wide variety of different languages it is widely believed language is learned, and each one of these alternatives offers some process by which learning takes place.

4. According to Ryle to say there is a mind and a body is like saying there is a Chevy and a Ford.
1. true 2. false

This question tests for the student's understanding of the conceptual distinction that Ryle's makes between mind and body. Getting this question right turns on the student's understanding of Ryle's criticisms of Descartes' analysis of the mind-body problem. Ryle thinks that Descartes commits a category mistake by placing both mind and body within the same category, the category of substances. For the student to get this question right she should understand Ryle's clarification of the logical status of mind. It requires the student to recognize that, on Ryle's account, the conjunctive proposition involving mind and body combines concepts that are not of the same logical type whereas the conjunctive proposition about a Chevy and a Ford does. That is, on Ryle's account mind and body are not both substances, whereas a Chevy and a Ford are both autos. Under Descartes' conception, which is the common sense one, the conjunctive proposition 'there is a mind and body' combines concepts that are of the same logical type as the conjunctive proposition 'there is a Chevy and a Ford' does. Thus, if the student doesn't understand Ryle's point, then '(1) true' is a plausible alternative.

5. This swan is white.
That swan is white.
Every swan we've ever seen is white.
We've never heard of any swans that aren't white.
Therefore, all swans are white.

The above argument
1. is valid
2. is deductive
3. is sound
4. is inductive
5. 1, 2 and 3

Getting this question right turns on the student's recognizing an inductive argument and its conceptual distinction from a deductive one. She must be aware that the terms valid and sound do not technically apply to inductive arguments.

Answers to MC questions.

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1. (3)
2. (4)
3. (3)
4. (2)
5. (4)

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